

MBUTI PYGMIES OF THE ITURI RAINFOREST



Mbuti Pygmies of the Ituri Rainforest

Recorded by Colin Turnbull and
Francis S. Chapman

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| 1. In the Rainforest Approaching a Forest Camp 1:32 | 20. First Molimo Fire Dance Song 1:59 |
| 2. Elephant Hunting Song 3:00 | 21. Second Molimo Fire Dance Song 1:22 |
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| 4. Spear Song 3:00 | 23. First Molimo song for great occasion 2:29 |
| 5. Cries of beaters, signalling and shouting 0:56 | 24. Second Molimo song for great occasion 1:51 |
| 6. Honey-Gathering Song 2:49 | 25. Molimo Song "Darkness Is Good" 2:14 |
| 7. Animal Dance Song 2:36 | 26. Molimo Song of Devotion to the Forest 1:30 |
| 8. Flute Duet 1:48 | |
| 9. Flute Solo 2:03 | |
| 10. Slit-gong signalling 1:10 | |
| 11. Mbuti Dance in Bantu Village 2:11 | Credits |
| 12. Lukembi and Voice 2:21 | Originally issued as Folkways FE 4457 and FE 4483 in 1957 and 1958 |
| 13. Lukembi (Mbuti) 1:33 | Recorded, compiled and edited by Colin Turnbull and Francis S. Chapman |
| 14. Bachelor duet with Lukembi 1:32 | Reissue compiled and edited by Michelle Kisliuk |
| 15. Musical Bow 2:27 | Remastered by Alan Yoshida, The Mastering Lab, Hollywood California |
| 16. Musical Sticks 1:40 | Cover design by Carol Hardy |
| 17. Nkumbi Initiation Song 0:40 | Reissue supervision by Anthony Seeger and Matt Walters with assistance from Chris Jerde and Edmond O'Reilly |
| 18. First Song of the Elima 1:50 | |
| 19. Second Song of the Elima 1:08 | |



These original Folkways recordings of the Mbuti pygmies, from the Ituri rainforest in northeastern Zaire, were first issued over thirty years ago. This anthology documents the Mbuti pygmies many elaborate singing styles, delicate harmonies, and striking instrumental music within their Ituri rainforest sound world. Featuring extensive notes by Colin Turnbull and a new introduction by Michelle Kisliuk.



**Smithsonian
Folkways**

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings
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Smithsonian Institution
Washington DC 20560

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Introduction to the 1991 Edition Michelle Kisliuk

In an essay published in 1990, Colin Turnbull wrote retrospectively about his visits to the Ituri forest in the 1950s, during which he recorded the selections in this anthology. First as a young person interested in music, and then as a professional anthropologist at the end of the decade, Turnbull noticed a striking difference between the lives of Mbuti pygmies when they were living and hunting in the forest, and when they stayed near the non-pygmy village. His impression was based foremost on a difference in soundscapes and in performance repertoire. With each of his visits this perception persisted: "When in 1957 I arrived back in the Ituri... I found myself making the same subjective judgments, particularly those that opposed the village world to the forest world. To me the forest was a much more beautiful world, and filled with something that in turn filled me." (1990:66)

During Turnbull's first few visits to the Ituri he did not live in the forest, as he did later, but in a village. In fact the purpose of his second visit, in 1954, was specifically to film the *nkumbi* initiation, "and record the associated music as well as the rest of the rich musical tradition of the villagers, and of course the very different musical tradition of the Mbuti." (1990:59) But, Turnbull adds, "when the Mbuti saw how interested I was in their music, they said that I would have to come with them into the forest as they only sang their 'real' music there." (1990:54)

This anthology was compiled from two LP recordings Colin Turnbull prepared for Folkways, FE 4457—issued in 1958—and FE 4483—issued in 1957. These recordings on Folkways were among the most popular releases of African music issued on that label, and sold steadily for decades. I have arranged the selections from the two albums roughly parallel to FE 4457: beginning in the forest, hunting and gathering, coming to the village for a Bantu initiation ritual, then returning to the forest for the Mbuti rituals.

The recordings and the notes reflect Turnbull's vision of the two contrasting worlds of Mbuti pygmies, as well as the integration of music, dance, and ritual performance with daily life. In his widely-read book, *The Forest People* (1961), Turnbull vividly describes the events recorded here: the *molimo*, the honey dance, the *elima*, and the village *nkumbi* initiation, also explained in the notes below.

Turnbull is a poignant and innovative writer. In *The Forest People* and other publications, he began to shift from an established convention of looking at 'social structure' to a new approach of looking at social processes. He also placed himself squarely within his own writing and explicitly presented his perspective on the events he described. This approach (today labeled "reflexivity"), along with his somewhat romantic vision of pygmy life and music, irked some people and influenced many others. Alan Lomax (1968, 1974), for example, based some of his theory about the relationship of sound structure to social structure on a correlation between pygmy "hocketing," the non-hierarchical structure of much Mbuti performance, and the egalitarian values of Mbuti as described by Turnbull. The ethnomusicologist Charles Keil also commented that he "long assumed that Mbuti hocketing in the rain forest and *Kung* hocketing in the desert were generalizable in some broad way across all hunting and gathering societies and perhaps across the whole spectrum of classless modes of production." (1984:446) (After further comparison of other 'egalitarian' musical cultures, however, Keil concluded that "the differences swamp the similarities." [p. 446])

I was inspired by Turnbull's writings and recordings to pursue an understanding of social and musical processes among African pygmies. My work with Biaka pygmies of the western Congo Basin focused in part on the question of pygmy 'egalitarianism' and how it takes shape in performance, especially in terms of gender relations (Kisliuk 1991; and in preparation). The contrast between pygmies and villagers in the area I worked in was not as pronounced as Turnbull describes for the Mbuti, and this is perhaps because the villagers further west have had a longer and more intimate

relationship with the forest. In the Biaka region, villager music and dance remains distinct from that of the pygmies, but unlike the Mbuti, Biaka pygmies do not change radically their repertoire depending on their proximity to a village.

Among the many language groups of pygmies in equatorial Africa, certain aspects of song style, like hocketing and yodelling, are fairly consistent. Beyond those similarities, however, song and dance repertoire and stylistic preferences vary greatly (see discography). For example, in contrast to the Mbuti whom Turnbull came to know, many other pygmies prefer to use drums with most of their dancing and singing.

The threat of cultural extinction faces many African pygmies today as they try to negotiate the massive changes and competing interests in the African rainforests, including lumber companies, missionaries, commercial hunting, tourism, and state "development." The cultural and economic resources of pygmies are being pushed to the extreme, and the question that hovers now is to what extent these peoples can retain their distinct identities, and with it their wondrous musical sensibility.*

Michelle Kisliuk
New York, June 1991

* Note: For information about how you might help the pygmies in their struggles, contact Cultural Survival, 11 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138 OR: Rainforest Action Network, 301 Broadway, Suite 28, San Francisco, CA 94133.

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Rainforest

Recorded by Colin Turnbull and Francis S. Chapman

Notes by Colin Turnbull, edited with a new introduction by Michelle Kisliuk. These recordings originally appeared on Folkways FE 4457 and FE 4483 in 1958 and 1957.

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26. **Molimo Song of Devotion to the Forest** 1:30

Notes by Colin Turnbull (originally written 1957-61) Edited by Michelle Kisliuk

The Ituri forest lies in the northeastern section of Zaire. Various ethnic groups, some of them driven east by slave traders, others driven out of their homelands by war, have been converging on the forest for some hundreds of years. From the north came the Mangbetu group; from the east the BaLese; from the south the BaBira and BaNdaka as well as the former slave raiders, the BaNgwana. These various groups brought to the forest Sudanic, Bantu and Arabic influences. Add to this miscellaneous influences from West Africa and the more recent but pervasive aroma of Western society, and you have a lively intermingling of cultures and languages.

But right among all these groups, and living in close contact with them, are perhaps the original inhabitants of the forest—the Mbuti pygmies. While the surrounding ethnic groups abound in instrumental music but have relatively undeveloped vocal music, the Mbuti have little instrumental music of their own but delight in elaborate song. This gives us some idea of the chosen insularity of the Mbuti in their forest. The more so as they are quite capable of playing any of the instruments they come in contact with, but choose not to adopt them as their own.

Mbuti music incorporates a relatively complex harmonic sense with a well developed sense of rhythm, in a show of technical virtuosity that would baffle any musicologist who could not see as well as hear what was going on. Mbuti melody is based almost entirely on the dominant, with the occasional addition of the seventh interval, and the melodies favor descending patterns. Given the dominant mode, one-chord harmony is the rule, and the thing to look for is the ability of Mbuti to improvise within this self-imposed limitation.

Mbuti listen intently to their own music as they sing, and the real meaning of the song, its importance and power, is in the sound. Words are relatively unimportant in pygmy songs—but texture and tone matter a great deal, and the Mbuti sing using four basic vowel sounds (ee, eh, oh, oo). They also use effects achieved by holding the nose, or singing from the throat or the stomach.

The Mbuti have a delicate sense of harmony, and as intricate a way of producing it as could be devised—each singer chooses one or two notes which he hoots at a given moment producing a melodic line that is passed among the singers, note by note, forming a harmonic pattern. This technique is not used all the time, but is favored in certain types of songs, such as hunting and gathering songs. These songs are often sung simply for pleasure, but may also be sung in thanks for a good day's hunting. During a song the singers

might recall stories of hunting from the distant past, or mime a moment from that day's hunt, making fun of some unfortunate person who trod on a twig at the wrong moment.

Mbuti do not make drums, and use them only when they can borrow or steal them from their neighbors. Drums would be too much trouble to make, and too cumbersome as property in the nomadic life they lead. Rhythm is often sounded with sticks, either struck together or split at the ends and used as percussive brushes on a log—these sticks are called *banza* and are used in the religious songs of men, and occasionally of women. The sticks may be left unshaven, in which case when clapped together they give a hollow sound—these are called *ngbenbê* and are used in hunting and gathering songs, often played with a syncopated beat. Against this a cross rhythm may be effected by handclaps, by drums if they are used, but, par excellence, by voices.

There are several different styles of Mbuti singing. One form is the solo singer over a chorus. Another common style is the cannon, and Mbuti give this a special name, *rondisa*; if they want to use this form someone will give the command, "*Rondisai!*" Here Mbuti compress or expand the melodic phrase according to the number of singers in the group, so that the cannon comes out in the right place at the right time. If the group is large, each singer, as the phrase is passed around anti-clockwise, will take his cue from the accepted beat, but will extend the phrase with elaborations according to his fancy so that there is no hiatus. The elaborations will usually be in a low vocal range, but sometimes the singer will break into a delicate falsetto.

Not only is Mbuti music interesting because of its relative complexity, but also because of the tremendous importance it plays in the social life of the people. The selections that follow are designed to show something of this, and to give a picture, in sound, of the life of these forest hunters and gatherers.

Although the Mbuti still live on the products of the forest, since the advance of other ethnic groups they have developed a liking for the crops grown on plantations—bananas, corn, manioc, and rice. For this, and for other reasons, pygmy hunting groups have formed alliances with non-pygmy villagers, and supply them with game from the forest in return for garden produce. When down in the village, Mbuti spend much time dancing and drinking palm wine. The dances are accompanied by drums and slit-gongs, and are performed by the pygmies with an air of showmanship, to delight their hosts.

Mbuti regard the Bantu village as a place where they can have a rest from the rigors of forest life, and a change from forest diet. They do a little work for the Bantu—cutting wood and carrying water—and are well fed and

cared for. The two peoples are friends, though each regards the other as essentially inferior. Both Bantu and Mbuti recognize a hereditary system by which certain pygmies are always associated with certain Bantu, but the relationship is by no means rigid. When a pygmy wanders off to a different part of the forest he will find a different patron, though he will never forget his hereditary *mkpara*.

Because the Mbuti associate with villagers such as the BaNdaka, Mbuti boys undergo the village *nkumbi* initiation, including circumcision. It is significant that for all the other important events in their life the Mbuti have an appropriate form of music, but for this initiation they have none. They merely learn and repeat the initiation songs of the Bantu. That fact alone indicates to some measure the limited value Mbuti place on the *nkumbi*. It gives them status among their neighbors, to whom the uninitiated are regarded as children without rights. But among the pygmies themselves the village initiation makes little, if any, difference.

The forest is the Mbuti's real home, shady and cool, unlike the plantations. The forest is full of wild fruits and vegetables, and game. Life is not hard, yet not too easy, and it pleases the Mbuti, who take a positive pride in their forest home. The non-pygmy people distrust and fear the forest, and believe it to be full of evil spirits. To the Mbuti it is kind and gentle, if sometimes aggravating. It is difficult to say what the Mbuti concept of religion is, but it can be said with certainty that whatever hazy ideas they might have about a supreme being, so inaccessible as to be virtually ignored, Mbuti have a definite feeling of some benevolent power who either resides in, or actually is the forest—the source of all good, and, ultimately, of all bad.

Initiation into adulthood for Mbuti is something quite different from the village *nkumbi*. Mbuti initiation confers the right to take part in the songs of the *molimo*, for boys, and the *elima*, for girls. For girls this right is attained at puberty, after a one-month seclusion. For boys it is attained when he has proven himself as a hunter—which may be some years after his village *nkumbi* initiation.

The songs of the *molimo* and *elima* are sacred and their use is restricted to initiates. The *molimo* is called at times of sickness, bad hunting, or death. In the evening the women and children are shut up in their houses, as they are not allowed to take part or even to witness the proceedings. The men gather around a single fire. They start singing, and may continue for hours without working up any particular enthusiasm. But then, perhaps when they are sure that all the women are asleep, one of the great *molimo* songs will begin, quietly at first, never rising to an exceptional volume. There is no frenzy or fanaticism in this music, but it is of the deepest significance to them. They are, by their act of singing the

sacred songs, communing with the god of the forest. He will hear them, whereas he ignores their ordinary songs. As they sing, with growing intensity of feeling, from far off in the night comes the echo of a long wooden horn, the *molimo* trumpet. One of the hunters has taken this into the forest and echoes the song of his fellows, passing it on still further so that their god may be sure to hear it. If the forest hears its people calling, that is sufficient.

Notes on the Music

[Note: The title of each selection is followed by the record and track number of the original LP release. This is to help those who remember the originals and want to find a certain track.]

1. Birds and Crickets; Bark-Cloth Hammering with the Voices of Young Boys in the Background (4457 A/1)

The Mbuti are essentially people of the forest, and they refer to themselves as such in opposition to "the people of the village." The Ituri forest is a dense, tropical rainforest with gigantic trees that meet high overhead, shutting out the sky and the heat of the sun, filling the glades below with a cool, shimmering green light. Only in certain places is the undergrowth thick and tangled, generally it is remarkably clear. Pygmies use animal paths, along which they move swiftly and silently if they are hunting, or swiftly and noisily if they are just going from one place to another. A long way before you reach a forest camp you can hear its sounds rising above the incessant chirp of birds and crickets and the rasping of frogs. You can hear the chatter of the youngsters left in the camp while the others are out hunting, the hammering out of bark on fallen tree trunks as the men make their strips of clothing, and if there are enough people in the camp they will sooner or later fall into song.

2. Elephant Hunting Song (4457 A/2)

Hunting is the major activity of Mbuti men, and it is their chief joy. Nothing is so good as a good hunt, and no-one is so great as a great hunter. And the greatest hunter of all is one who has killed an elephant. This they do either by slitting the tendons on the rear heel of the animal, and as it turns in rage another man dashes forward with his spear and slits the tendon on the other heel. Or else they may run up right underneath the animal and thrust their short spears into its bladder. They call the rest of their group to track the wounded elephant, and the whole camp breaks and follows the trail. After they have found the elephant and made the final kill, they set up a camp to feast, dance, and sing.

3. Elephant Hunt Song (4483 A/10)

In this elephant-hunting song split sticks are used to mark the time, and only the men and boys around the main fire are singing. They start off with a

couple of chords, but then as usual there is a long warming-up period. The solo is taken up by two young hunters, overlapping, taking over from each other the story of the hunt. The chorus, very hesitant and uncertain to begin with, slowly gets under way, using the hocketing technique in which each singer has one or two particular notes, and in this way a harmonic as well as melodic pattern is passed around the circle. As the chorus takes shape the soloist tells his simple story, occasionally breaking off to tell the others that they are putting up a pretty poor show. Then he stands up and begins to dance. The chorus and the split sticks continue without change now, and the soloist dances in the firelight, miming the story of the elephant hunt. He ends his act with a series of yodels of satisfaction.

4. Spear Song (4457 A/3)

Virtually all pygmies know how to use a bow and arrow and will carry one with them for protection. Some pygmies, however, such as the Efe archers in the east of the Ituri, use exclusively bows and arrows for hunting. Other pygmies, particularly in the north and west of the Ituri, use mostly spears. They have a repertoire of songs like this one, associated with spear hunting.

5. Cries of Beaters During Net Hunting; Signalling and Shouting (4457 A/5, abridged)

The pygmies in the center of the Ituri forest use nets to hunt. Each family will have a net, about four feet high and up to a hundred yards long. They tie the nets together in a vast semi-circle and as the men stand guard the women, at a given signal, start driving the animals into the nets, crying and whooping as they advance. The men can tell each other from a distance how the hunt is going by clapping their elbows, which they cup against their sides.

6. Honey-Gathering Song (4457 A/6)

Just as important as hunting, as an economic activity, is gathering. This is the work of women, and as they go on the hunt with their menfolk, or as they move about their various chores, they occasionally dart off the path to pick mushrooms, or nuts, or edible roots. But one form of gathering surpasses all others—the gathering of honey. The honey season lasts for only two months, and all other activity is abandoned as far as possible. Of all foods honey is the most delicious to the Mbuti, and they distinguish many different kinds of it, savoring them all as a European connoisseur savors wine... but only for a moment. Then it is a free-for-all and everyone plunges into the haul and in no time it is all gone. Some honey is found in the ground, but most is high up in the trees and it is the work of men to climb up, carrying fire with them to stun the bees, and fetch it down. Honey-gathering songs seem to convey something of the gaiety and lightheartedness of the season. The

nngenbe sticks give an added stimulus and vitality to the music.

7. Animal-Dance Song (4457 A/7)

Much of the two honey-gathering months is given over to feasting and dancing. During the dances a leader imitates the actions and sounds of an antelope or some other beast, and often reenacts incidents from a hunt.

8. Flute Duet (4457 A/9)

The only kind of instrumental music one might hear among the Mbuti is either the flute or the *lukembi* (see below). The flute is made out of one of several different kinds of reed or cane. Sometimes it is played singly, sometimes two flutes are played together. They are seldom used for long, though, thrown away and forgotten almost as soon as they are made.

9. Flute Solo (4483 A/9)

This Mbuti man, Pakasi, cut a piece of cane, burned four stop-holes at the lower end, plugged that end with a rolled leaf, and then notched the top end, all in a few minutes. After playing a while he seemed to lose all interest in the flute.

10. Slit-Gong Signalling in Village (4483 A/7)

In the villages of the Ituri region a wooden gong is used for signalling. All the villagers understand the signals, whether they are BaBira, BaNdaka, BaNgwana, Mabudo, or BaLese. While not able to "talk" like the west coast talking drums, the gong sends out recognized signals each with its own accepted meaning. It is most frequently used for calling people together or for announcing arrivals and departures from the village.

11. Mbuti Dance in Bantu Village (4457 A/7) ~~4457~~ 81?

The Bantu always give the pygmies a warm welcome when they troop in from the forest because it means not only that they will have meat (as much as the Mbuti see fit to give them) but also that they will have dancing. The pygmies are regarded by the Bantu as specially good dancers. For Mbuti, this is a time for eating and drinking and merry-making. They take over the Bantu drums and perform a dance which is a play not only between the sexes but also between the individual dancers and the main drummer. The Mbuti form a circle, half women and half men. There may be from one to four drums, but usually three. Of these, all except the main drum have their own distinct pattern. The main drummer alone is allowed to improvise, which he does to such an extent that he sometimes seems to forget the basic eight-beat measure, though he never does. The men and women come out in pairs and dance toward each other, pretending to offer advances—accept or reject them—all with great humor. Their feet and gestures follow the drums, and work up to a sudden twist

of the body which comes on the eighth beat, coinciding with a riff on the main drum. The main drummer sometimes has different ideas, however, pretending to lead up to the final flourish, then veering away at the last moment, leaving the dancer almost suspended in mid-air. The dance is fast and exciting, and always draws a large crowd of Bantu onlookers.

12. *Lukembi* and Voice (4483 A/1)

This young BaNgwana man, Abdul Aziz, accompanies himself on the *lukembi* (elsewhere known as *sansa* or *mbira*), a small instrument made from a hollowed-out piece of wood, to which ten metal keys are fitted, passing over a bridge and bound at one end with vine. Each tribe has its own particular tuning for these keys, sliding them in or out to vary the pitch. Originally the keys were made of bamboo, but today old umbrella stays are more convenient. Abdul Aziz sings a quiet falsetto. His joy in the music lies mainly in his skill with the *lukembi*. He shakes his head from side to side as he sings: "Ah me! I've lost my wife and don't know where to find her." Then, after a brief cadenza on the *lukembi*: "Alas, alas, and now I've lost my hen."

13. *Lukembi* (Mbuti) (4457 A/10)

Mbuti borrow or steal *lukembi* from the villagers, and tune them to their own scale. But whether it be in the village or the forest, the *lukembi* is only incidental in the music of the Mbuti.

14. Bachelor Duet with *Lukembi* (4457 B/2)

When Mbuti stay near the Bantu village it is also a time when youths flirt with the eligible girls from other Mbuti groups. Here two bachelors, one playing the *lukembi*, sing to each other about the joys of being single and the fun of being able to chase women instead of animals.

15. Musical Bow (4483 B/8)

The bow is one of the simplest of all instruments: a bent sapling stretching a piece of dried vine. One end is held on the ground with the toes, the other close to the mouth which acts as a resonator. Occasionally a pygmy will use his hunting bow in this way, the arrow-shaft serving to tap the string. On this occasion, however, a BaNdaka man plays the bow, shouting "Budah!" in the middle of his performance as an expression of achievement.

16. Musical Sticks (4483 B/1)

Once every three years the *nkumbi* initiation for boys takes place. This is a Bantu festival, but Mbuti take part. The beginning of the *nkumbi* is heralded by the sounding of the *makata* sticks, which are made specially for each *nkumbi*, and destroyed along with the initiation camp when it is all over. The number of sticks varies from six to nine; during this initiation there were nine. Each player takes a stick and holds it under his left arm, hitting it with a wooden

clapper held in the right hand. The sticks are carefully shaved to exactly the right pitch: the bass stick is about three feet long, the treble only eighteen inches. The leader of the group beats the bass stick, and, somewhat like the master drummer in West Africa, produces a variety of cross rhythms while trying to draw the other players off the beat. The *makata* players lead a dance, followed in single file by any men or boys who care to participate. They are joined by a masked dancer—the man who will perform the circumcision operations—who dances with ankle bells that can be heard on the recording.

17. *Nkumbi* Initiation Song (Pygmy boys, led by BaNdaka villager) (4457 B/3 edited selection)
One strange thing about the relationship between the Mbuti and the Bantu is the thoroughness with which Mbuti seem to adopt, even to have forced on them, the habits and customs of the Bantu, and the ease and completeness with which they throw them off when they return to the forest. Perhaps the most interesting example of this is when Mbuti boys undergo the *nkumbi* initiation, including circumcision in most cases, at the hands of their Bantu patrons. This is done when the boys are between the ages of 9 and 12, and Mbuti and Bantu boys are initiated together. During the months that follow they are taught a number of initiation songs like this one. At the end of the festival there is a "coming out" dance, and the boys are then considered men and treated as such in the Bantu village. But as soon as the Mbuti return to their forest, those same boys are once again treated as children; the initiation in no way affects their status in the forest.

18. First Song of the *Elima*, the Women's Society (4457 B/5)

19. Second Song of the *Elima*, the Women's Society (4457 B/4)
With the girls it is different. There is a form of initiation which the Mbuti and two of the Bantu groups (BaNdaka and BaBira) share in common, the *elima*. This is an individual affair, the girls undergo their *elima* when they have their first menstrual period. The *elima* initiates girls into womanhood, and fits them for married life. If two or more girls are nearly ready at the same time they may wait to enter the *elima* house together, where they stay for one month, surrounded by their friends and chaperoned by one or two older women. They make frequent sorties from their house to beat up the youths who gather around. Occasionally an initiate appears in front of her hut, her body shining with palm oil, and she sings while the young men form an admiring group nearby and chant the chorus. That the *elima* is of importance to the Mbuti is shown by the very special songs the Mbuti women have for the *elima*. In the evening the older women will sit

outside the *elima* house, the girls with them or else inside. All sing, and slowly a circle of boys gather, who add a throaty chorus to some of the songs. When the women sing you can hear clearly the distinctive Mbuti style of singing in parallel seconds. These same songs are used to consecrate any rite of passage affecting women—a birth, marriage, or the death of a girl or woman. Mbuti women sanctify an event by singing the *elima* songs. In the first of the two songs three girls sing together in the foreground, with a delicate sense of harmony and a fine ear for pitch.

20. First *Molimo* Fire Dance Song (4457 B/7)

21. Second *Molimo* Fire Dance Song (4457 B/8)
In times of crisis, when a great hunter dies, or when hunting is excessively bad, you might expect to find Mbuti practicing magic. But in this case music is the magic, for under stress and strain the Mbuti find a solution to their plight in song, and above all in the songs of the *molimo*, a religious association of the men. The men meet in the evening and they chase the women off to bed with mocking songs. When the women are all in their huts, the real singing begins. The men sing to the forest. As they sing they dance around the fire. Occasionally they will dance through the fire, scattering it as though plunging their world into darkness. Then from out of the darkness comes the sound of their own song being echoed by one of their best singers into a long wooden horn (not recorded), passing the song into the forest, to their god.

22. *Molimo* Song with a Preliminary Argument (4483 B/5)

The brief argument included here is an invariable occurrence. The Mbuti are, like many artists, a temperamental people. In matters concerning their songs they are particularly so, and this argument developed because the men insisted on singing *molimo* songs, which meant that the women could not participate. The complaining voices of some of the women can be heard in the background during the song, hurling abuse at the men.

23. First *Molimo* Song Sung Only on Occasions of Great Importance (4457 B/9)

24. Second *Molimo* Song Sung Only on Occasions of Great Importance (4475 B/10) 4-157
The singing will go on all night, with a short break, and start up again at 5 o'clock in the morning until daylight. All the time the women are rigorously excluded. The songs are graded in importance, some of them only sung on occasions such as the death of one of the elders or great hunters.

25. *Molimo* Song, "Darkness is Good" (4483 B/4)

This is one of the more serious *molimo* songs, and may be sung only by initiates. It expresses the devotion of the Mbuti to the forest, and their trust in it. This is a song sung in a time of crisis, but the words contain no plea, no reproach. They repeat one of the many names by which Mbuti call their god, and express their trust. A free translation is: Where is there darkness?/Darkness is all around us/If darkness is, then darkness is good.

26. *Molimo* Song of Devotion to the Forest (4457 B/11)

For the Mbuti, the forest is a world that is essentially good, and where life normally runs smoothly and easily. Any break in that flow is abnormal, but the pygmies do not attribute this break to any malevolence, nor to any evil person or spirit at work. I have heard Mbuti say that "if things go wrong, it must be because God is sleeping. If he were awake and seeing us he would not let this happen." So what do they do? They sing. And the power of the song is to awaken their god—and that is all that is needful, for when he is awake then everything will return to normal. It is by a special sound that God can be awakened, and the real initiation for Mbuti boys is like that of the girls; it is the acquisition of the right to take part in these sacred songs, upon which the welfare of the community depends.

About the authors

Colin Turnbull is a renowned anthropologist and author of several influential books of popular as well as scholarly appeal. Some of these are listed in the bibliography.

Michelle Kisliuk compiled this recording from the previously released LP recordings, wrote the new introduction, and edited Dr. Turnbull's original liner notes to reflect changes in organization and content. Dr. Kisliuk specializes in ensemble musical performance, including African performance, and has researched and written on the music of the Biaka pygmies of the Central African Republic.

Credits

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